

# 2014 Maine Wildlife Park

## Year in Review



Just like that - 2014 has come and gone at the Maine Wildlife Park. The Park environment is so full of activity - visitors, events, projects and programs, that the open season passes in the blink of an eye. It's a fast paced environment full of energy, enthusiasm and dedication, contributed by the many volunteers and staff that the Park is so fortunate to have. I have often wondered

why the Park should be so fortunate to have the hard work of so many. While I'm sure there is no universal reason that explains why over 200 volunteers are willing to donate a piece of their life to the park, I know that the results of their efforts are an unmistakable monument to their service.

The attendance of 2014 serves as another tribute to the hard work of the park's diverse workforce. Despite losing a week of business this spring due to residual snow and ice, the season's attendance and revenue was quite favorable. Down only about 4% from our all-time record in 2013, the park's attendance and revenue was historically very high and demonstrated new growth in some categories. Our shelter reservation and photopass programs continued to show rapid growth this year, with 42% and 23% revenue increases. Season pass membership also finished strong again in 2014, and wagon rentals proved to be more popular than our traditional stroller rentals.

The Park's other revenue generating operations also demonstrated relatively low decreases despite the shorter operating season. The Nature Store and Snack Shack finished very strongly, with both featuring new products for our visitors. The park also featured new and repeated events, like the Farmer's Market and North Woods Law Day, each with excellent turnouts. On Saturday, June 21st, the park's combined day and evening open house attendance brought in over 2,800 visitors - our busiest day on record!

This was also the day of the Wilbur dedication ceremony, in which the farmhouse was officially renamed "The Wilbur House" in memory of former park Superintendent Dave Wilbur. The day's record attendance was a fitting tribute to him and his family.



2014 also marked some special project milestones that serve as tremendous improvements for our visitors and wildlife. The Park's brand new "Critter Corner" and accompanying Visitor Center displays were completed in the spring, allowing us to feature new members of Maine's native fauna such as snakes, amphibians, small mammals and more. Previously lacking the facilities to house and care for these small creatures, they now enjoy state-of-

the-art accommodations and provide excellent viewing and learning opportunities for our visitors. Down the hill from the picnic area, the turtle exhibit featured a very different look for 2014, with a major renovation that ensures a more consistent habitat for our turtles and better viewing for turtle-watchers.

Just as the park opening showcased new exhibits this spring, fall marked the completion of our new Canada lynx enclosure just before closing. This beautiful facility is spacious and attractive to lynx and people alike. Our two new lynx kittens, growing fast, have enjoyed their new home tremendously, and are anxious to dazzle our visitors in the spring! A dedication ceremony in early 2015 will honor the Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park and others who helped make it a reality.



The Park's wildlife also experienced an upgrade of a different kind this year. Our first long-term 'enrichment' program was launched in 2014. Park volunteers and staff spent nearly 200 hours observing and documenting the behaviors of many of our captive wildlife to develop strategies for introducing play things and habitat components that occupy their time and energy. This program has been a tremendous success and resulted in new behaviors that are enriching for animals and human observers alike! Enrichment devices are constantly being rotated and are usually discrete; so people may not see the new toy that's keeping a particular species occupied. Look for many more of these in 2015!



## PARK HEROS REMEMBERED

Unfortunately, all park news can't always be good news. Sadly, 2014 marked the passing of two park volunteers who had been instrumental to the park's development and transformation. Maryann Robinson passed away on June 23rd. As the proud manager of the Snack Shack for over 15 years, Maryann's sound administration of the Shack's operations made it a tremendous success for the Friends and the Park. The Shack's refreshments brought enjoyment to nearly 1.5 million park visitors during Maryann's tenure, bringing smiles to our visitors and hundreds of thousands of

funding dollars that allowed for improved enclosures for our wildlife. It is no wonder that the Shack and our new mountain lion proudly bear her name.

Another devastating loss in 2014 was that of Joe Jones. As Friends President for over 20 years, Joe was instrumental in establishing the Friends group and developing its role as an essential park entity. Under his tenure as President, the Friends supported countless Park projects, programs, and played a critical role in its development into our modern day facility. Joe's role in leading the Friends into a new era of park-volunteer relations, and the subsequent projects that followed cannot be overstated. Joe was a skilled gardener and also established the Friends role in the Park's gardening operation. Up until recently, when his health no longer permitted, Joe could be found at the park nearly every single morning, checking on the plants, the greenhouse, and visiting with park animals. The Park will not be the same without Joe and Maryann, and they will be sorely missed.

## WHAT NEXT?

Winter is not a quiet time at the Maine Wildlife Park. Beyond the careful routine care of our wildlife, maintenance and construction projects dominate our daily schedules. There are many changes in store for 2015, and it's always with the help of park volunteers that we can bring on new improvements! During the winter months, work crews from the Maine Correctional Center play a critical role in completing ambitious projects. To date, renovations to the eagle exhibit, snack shack, tree trail, fence lines and others have already been completed. Other projects that will take shape this winter include the construction of another shelter in the picnic area, park furniture repair and replacement, greenhouse re-siding and more. Park staff and volunteers are also working on the introduction of new displays at the Visitor's Center, Nature Store, cougar exhibit, tree trail, and new park signage.

The biggest project for 2015 will be a major renovation of the Park's bear exhibit. The bear fence line has sustained extensive damage over the years, and its replacement has provided the opportunity to improve the appearance and function of the entire bear enclosure. The renovation will likely include the addition of new habitat and viewing components, while improving the appearance of structures and systems that do not require replacement. When complete, the bears will enjoy a remodeled exhibit that better suits their lifestyle, while enhancing the appearance and viewing opportunities for our visitors.

Like the flurry of our open season, the remaining months of winter will soon pass and the park will be preparing to open its gates again. In the meantime, it is a great time of year to reflect upon the people that have played a vital role in the success of our facility. The Maine Wildlife Park has been very fortunate to benefit from our loyal corps of volunteers not only in 2014, but for several decades now. Your hard work and dedication always has, and continues to serve as the greatest asset of this facility. On behalf of the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, the Wildlife Park Staff, and even the critters, thanks for giving us another excellent year!



*Curt Johnson, MWP Superintendent*